

## Revision checklist for argument or position papers

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Adapted from  
*The Bedford Guide for Writing Tutors*  
Fourth Edition  
Leigh Ryan and Lisa Zimmerelli

In argument or position papers, writers take stands on debatable issues, such as requiring comprehensive examinations for graduation, imposing curfews for teenagers, or changing the electoral college. Such papers aim to get readers to think differently about a certain issue or to persuade them to take a certain stance. Writers of argument or position papers should envision skeptical audiences and build arguments that are strong enough to stand up to opponents' views. As they write, they should anticipate readers' objections, refuting them or conceding points while indicating, for example, that there are more important issues to be considered.

- ☐ Is the claim or proposition—what the writer is trying to prove—clearly stated?
- ☐ Are all assertions supported by evidence?
- ☐ Is the evidence—facts, interpretations of facts, opinions—appropriate? Data should be accurate, recent, and sufficient. Sources cited should be reliable.
- ☐ Does the arrangement of evidence make sense? Does it emphasize the most important issues? Are there more effective ways of arranging the evidence?
- ☐ Are facts, statistics, examples, anecdotes, and expert opinions placed properly? Are they used in the appropriate context?
- ☐ Is the evidence carefully documented?
- ☐ Is the reasoning sound?
- ☐ Has the writer avoided all logical fallacies?
- ☐ Are terms that might be controversial or ambiguous adequately defined?
- ☐ Have opposing arguments been considered and dealt with adequately?

## Ways to narrow a subject to a topic

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### Subdividing your subject

Many subjects can be divided into smaller pieces. One way to subdivide a subject is to ask questions sparked by reading or talking to your classmates. If you are writing about teen pregnancy, for example, you might wonder why some cities have different rates of teen pregnancy. Or you might ask whether high schools should provide child care for teen mothers. Either question would give you a manageable topic for a short paper.

### Restricting your purpose

Often you can restrict your purpose. For example, if your subject is preventing teen pregnancy, you might at first hope to call readers to action. Upon further reflection, you might realize that this goal is more than you could hope to accomplish, given your word limit. By adopting a more limited purpose — to show that an experimental health class targeted at sixth graders results in lower rates of teen pregnancy or to argue for more funding for educational programs — you would have a manageable topic and a better chance of success.

### Restricting your audience

Consider writing for a particular audience. For example, instead of writing for a general audience on a broad subject such as teenage pregnancy, you might address groups with a special interest in the subject: young people, parents, educators, or politicians.

### Considering the information available to you

Look at the information you have collected. If you have gathered a great deal of information on one aspect of your subject (for example, counseling programs for pregnant teenagers) and less information on other aspects (such as birth control education or the rights of teen fathers), you may have found your topic.

## Strategies for concluding an essay

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Whatever concluding strategy you choose, avoid introducing wholly new or unrelated ideas at the end of an essay. Also avoid apologies and other limp, indeterminate endings. Do not become discouraged if the perfect conclusion eludes you at the rough-draft stage. Because the conclusion is so closely tied to the rest of the essay in both content and tone, you may well decide to rework it (or even replace it) at a later stage.

**TIP:** Because your ideas will evolve as you draft your essay, you may find that your draft conclusion contains a statement of your thesis that is more developed than the thesis in your original introduction. If this is the case, make sure that your introduction reflects the revised thesis.

Good conclusions generally use at least one of these strategies; the strategies can also be combined.

### **Summarize your essay's key points.**

While it's not necessary to revisit every point in an essay, it can be useful to summarize your main points, especially if you have made a complex argument. A brief summary also allows you to create continuity between your introduction and your conclusion by bringing your ideas full circle.

### **Propose a course of action or offer a recommendation.**

Where appropriate, consider proposing a course of action for your readers. For example, if you have argued that advertising snack foods on television contributes to obesity in children, you might conclude by suggesting that parents restrict the hours of television their children watch.

### **Discuss the wider significance or implications of your essay.**

The conclusion is an appropriate place to put your ideas into a larger context. At the end of an essay about online voting technology, you might suggest that simplifying the voting process could strengthen American democracy by empowering a new generation of voters.

### **Offer advice to your readers.**

Where appropriate, conclude by offering advice to your readers. If you have written a personal essay about working with children with special needs, for example, you might conclude by giving some general tips on how to interact with such children.

### **Pose a question for future study.**

Sometimes in the process of exploring a question, other, more complex questions that are beyond the scope of your essay will occur to you. If your essay explores the benefits of organic produce, for example, you might conclude by suggesting that a study of organic farming and its economic impact on conventional farmers would add to our understanding of this issue. Make sure that any question you pose in your conclusion is a natural extension of the ideas you've discussed in your essay rather than a completely new idea.

## How to Make Sentences Clear and Concise

Richard Lanham, a professor of English at UCLA, invented an easy-to-use method for making your writing clearer and more concise. The Writing Center strongly advocates Lanham's "Paramedic Method" for your writing. Here's how to do it:

**1a. Circle the Prepositions.** Too many prepositions can drain all the action out of a sentence. Get rid of the prepositions, and find a strong active verb to make the sentence direct:

*Original:* In this passage is an example of the use of the rule of justice in argumentation.

*Revised:* This passage exemplifies argumentation using the rule of justice.

**1b. Circle the "is" forms.** Using "is" in a sentence gets it off to a slow start, and makes the sentence weak. Replace as many "to be" verbs with action verbs as you can, and change all passive voice ("is defended by") to an active voice ("defends").

*Original:* The point I wish to make is that fish sleep with their eyes open.

*Revised:* Fish sleep with their eyes open.

**2. Ask, "Where's the action?" "Who's kicking who?"** (using Lanham's own terminology here--to be precise, it would be "Who kicks whom?"). If you get stuck in a passive sentence always ask the question: "Who does what to whom?" If you use that formula you will always write active sentences.

*Original:* Burning books is considered censorship by some people.

*Revised:* Some people consider burning books censorship.

**3. Put this "kicking" action in a simple active verb.**

*Original:* The theory of relativity isn't demonstrated by this experiment.

*Revised:* This experiment does not demonstrate the theory of relativity.

**4. Start fast--no slow windups.** Stick to the action and **avoid** opening sentences with phrases like these:

- My opinion is that....
- The point I wish to make is that ...
- The fact of the matter is that...

Want more information? Lanham's [\*Revising Prose\*](#), a concise and witty guide to style in writing, should be on your bookshelf.